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SUBJECT: EAP A/S Hill's Meeting with Vietnamese FM Nguyen
Dzy Nien

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: During his meeting January 13 with Foreign Minister Nguyen Dzy Nien, EAP Assistant Secretary Christopher R. Hill underlined the need for the United States and Vietnam to systematize their bilateral discussions on issues of mutual interest, such as Burma and Cambodia; expressed support for strong regional architecture; and pressed Vietnam to make progress on WTO and improve its human rights situation. FM Nien pledged to work closely with the United States to make the President's November visit to Hanoi a success; said Vietnam would welcome and strongly support the United States as an observer at the East Asia Summit; noted that the DPRK's foreign minister plans to visit Vietnam in the first half of 2006; and agreed that the situations in Burma and Cambodia are troubling. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) EAP Assistant Secretary Christopher R. Hill opened his 30-minute meeting with Foreign Minister Nguyen Dzy Nien January 13 by outlining his talks earlier in the day with senior MFA officials responsible for American and Asian affairs (septels, full participants list in paragraph 10). These discussions had been valuable and pointed to a need to systematize bilateral contacts on areas of mutual interest, such as Southeast Asia and China. The Foreign Minister responded that, based on the briefing he had received on these earlier discussions, he shares most of A/S Hill's views of bilateral, regional and global issues.

High-level Visits to Vietnam

¶3. (SBU) A/S Hill conveyed the greetings of the Secretary, who had had a valuable meeting with FM Nien in Busan in November 2005. President Bush himself is looking forward to visiting Vietnam, to which FM Nien replied that the GVN is ready to welcome him and work closely with the USG and Embassy to ensure a successful outcome. Developing a roadmap for the visit over the next several months would be useful, FM Nien opined. A/S Hill responded that he plans to visit Vietnam again, perhaps in the spring, for discussions on our bilateral agenda.

Regional Issues

¶4. (SBU) As A/S Hill had told VFM Le Van Bang earlier in the day, the United States and Vietnam have many issues of common interest and need to have a structured dialogue to exchange views. For example, the situation in Cambodia is worrisome. Hun Sen is creating problems and may be turning Cambodia into the next Burma. FM Nien responded that Hun

Sen "will listen if you speak frankly to him."

¶15. (SBU) Within ASEAN, Burma remains the odd man out, and A/S Hill said he would meet the Malaysian Foreign Minister to discuss this matter later in the week. Instead of regional actors such as ASEAN, China and India taking turns shifting responsibility to one another when it comes to addressing the Burma problem, a more coordinated approach is needed. Burma has great potential and natural resource wealth, but the problem is how to develop, FM Nien observed. The current situation is not good for Burma or the region. Although ASEAN has its non-interference principle, this does not mean that it cannot express its views. There are certain ways that states need to behave, A/S Hill said, and it is sometimes hard to draw a line between internal and external affairs. FM Nien expressed his agreement.

¶16. (SBU) Another issue raised in A/S Hill's other meetings was North Korea. FM Nien noted that the DPRK had reacted strongly to the July 2004 mass defection of North Koreans from Ho Chi Minh City to Seoul. Now, both countries continue to work to "normalize" their relations, and the DPRK Foreign Minister plans to visit Vietnam in the first half of 2006. China needs to take greater responsibility for North Korea, A/S Hill stressed, but the historic nature of the DPRK-PRC relationship makes this difficult.

¶17. (SBU) On regional architecture, A/S Hill noted that the December East Asia Summit (EAS) in Kuala Lumpur. The U.S. continues to welcome regional cooperation and integration, and would pay close attention to the EAS. On the ASEAN Regional Forum, A/S Hill said that the Secretary plans to attend this year's meeting in Kuala Lumpur. This reflects our commitment to the region. FM Nien said that Vietnam seeks an EAS that is inclusive and would welcome and strongly support observer status for the United States and Russia.

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WTO

¶18. (SBU) FM Nien said Vietnam is looking forward to next week's bilateral WTO accession talks. A/S Hill replied that, the sooner Vietnam joins, the sooner Vietnam's economy will reap the benefits. We should not miss this window of opportunity, particularly because this is an election year in the United States. We have to move quickly.

Human Rights

¶19. (SBU) Noting the upcoming Human Rights Dialogue (scheduled for February 20), A/S Hill said it would be important for DRL A/S Lowenkron to be able to meet whomever he would like to meet. The United States does not want the issues of human rights and religious freedom to burden the bilateral relationship, and we need to see Vietnam make further progress. FM Nien noted that former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore had often said that his country had been able to avoid criticism about its human rights situation because it was open. FM Nien thus often told his colleagues in the GVN, including the Ministry of Public Security, that Vietnam needs to be more open. A/S Hill agreed, noting that the more open a country is, the stronger it is.

¶10. (U) Participants:

United States

Assistant Secretary Christopher R. Hill
Ambassador Michael W. Marine
EAP Special Assistant Kamala Lakshdhir

Pol/C Marc Knapper (notetaker)

Vietnam

Foreign Minister Nien
Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung
Americas Department Deputy Director Nguyen Anh Dzong
U.S. Desk Director Nguyen Hoanh Nam
U.S. Desk Officer Lai Thai Binh

11. (U) A/S Hill has cleared this message.

BOARDMAN